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PAGAN
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Hill Country Pagan Grove

Austin, Texas, U.S.A.

Merlana

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Preface

Some have asked how this little booklet came into being. It's all very straightforward: as the most visible representatives of paganism here in Austin, Texas, I and my consort, Arnthor Phalius, are asked often to appear in public to talk about witchcraft. The questions included here are those most often asked, along with the answers we give.

Of course we cannot pretend to speak for all Pagans, only for ourselves. But the little booklet has been well-received as a non-threatening method of getting to know a subject like Wicca. Occasionally we will find someone who has had negative experiences with persons who call themselves Wiccans or Witches, and in those cases they expressed relief on find that `other types' of Pagans existed than those which had given them their initial bad impressions.

The Directory* is an individual effort at networking in the Sunbelt. Here in Texas there are many traditions and varieties of Paganism, and if one isn't to be alone, one must learn that there are more similarities than differences in Paganism and the other major religions. Pagans have always known this, but for various reasons, have not stepped forward as representatives of this view.

I (Merlana) am a mystic who responds to the Universal Mind as it is expressed in Nature. It is my deep belief that persons who reverence these principles are unified at bottom, and separated only by the illusion of words, which are not reality. Sometimes words aren't even adequate representations of `Reality`!

It is my intention in this little booklet to re-define some issues and terms in the way that my tradition sees them. It so happens that much of the rest of Paganism falls within this general framework. (NOTE: A `tradition' is a varietal type, like `denomination').

If you already know the subject and wish to differ, your comments are welcome. If you are new to the subject, perhaps here you'll find some questions answered, and (if wanted) fellowship with others who are on similar paths. Directory* listings are free to those in the Sunbelt of the USA (South and Southwest.) New editions are published irregularly.

If you don't live in the Sunbelt, but have goods or services which interest Pagans, you may also put an ad into the Directory.* Write for details.

Blessed be, Merlana April 1983

What Is Wicca?

`Wicca' (pronounced Wick-ah) is one name given to the Nature religions practiced in Northern Europe and the Middle East from the times of the ice ages. It is one spiritual path out of many in a group of spiritual practices known as NeoPaganism. NeoPaganism is currently in a world-wide revival, led by persons and groups in the United States and Britain.

How Do Wicca And Neopaganism Fit Together?

Wicca is one subsidiary form, or `tradition,' similar to the way Christianity has many forms. One can be a Christian and still be Baptist, Methodist or Roman Catholic. In the same way, one can be a Pagan but ascribe to another, more specific, sub-variety of philosophy.

Is It The Same As Witchcraft?

One linguistic theory has the word Wicca coming from Olde English `Wicca-Craeft', meaning `craft of the wise ones.' Most followers of Wicca (and most Pagans) prefer not to use the terms `witchcraft' or `witch' because of the emotional connotations these words carry in our society.

Generally, one who calls him or herself a `witch' without further qualifications is seeking notoriety and special attention. Those of us who guard the portals of personal Power (like Carlos Casteneda's character Don Juan) are normally hard to find or engage in discussion. Our Mysteries are carefully hidden from the world, and from those who might be tempted to misuse them.

What Do You Believe About God?

Although Pagans generally agree that one God exists and is the same regardless of name, they vary in specific concepts about God, as in other religions.

What an individual Pagan holds is strictly a matter of personal belief. However, occasionally a tradition will teach highly-specific concepts, structures and mythologies. If one finds oneself in disagreement, the best policy is `voting with the feet', or withdrawing to find another group who better agrees.

NOTE: Sometimes it may be easier to gather together a group of people who believe as you do to form an entirely new group. That's the purpose of networking, or what the booklet is designed for.

Most Wiccans divide the Godhead (generally conceived of as Mother Nature) into two forces. One force is male and the other female. They are called respectively: The God and The Goddess.

Between them, these two divinities create balance and harmony in the Eternal Dance. They represent the forces of birth, death and regeneration symbolized in the change of the seasons. Wiccans call 5this cycle The Wheel Of The Year. Most rituals celebrate the Wheel Of The Year and our deep, meaningful participation in natural cycles of change.

Because the male force has been in ascendancy for thousands of years due to the Christian, Moslem and Jewish religions, there is presently a tendency to emphasize The Goddess, especially by feminists (or by those whose personal concept of God happens to be female).

We also believe in Magick, which is a partnership between humanity and the Universal Mind. This partnership creates changes in what we normally call `reality', i.e., change accomplished with prayer. These changes can seem miraculous or merely coincidental, and always include personal effort. Magick is not the same as `wishing.'

What Happens At A Wiccan Ceremony?

There are several types of get-togethers that Pagans of all traditions attend. The most available and open is called a `Grove,' where those who wish may study both spiritual and ceremonial topics. Most groves emphasize fellowship and harmony of mind between their members. You should choose one as much for how you blend with the personalities of the members as for a particular brand of teaching.

Eight times a year, at the solstices and equinoxes, May Day, Halloween, and other points on the lunar calendar, Pagans gather together (usually outdoors under trees) to celebrate Nature and the turn of the seasons.

These celebrations consist of dancing, prayer, invocations, and rituals passed down from the many traditions through the ages. We also urge participants to develop and use their own original rituals and to share them with others.

Because we dance and pray in a standing Circle (or sometimes a spiral), and because we draw at these times from the Universe spherical energies of protection and power - these meetings are called (appropriately enough!) Circles.

How Can I Attend A Grove Or Circle?

Wiccans and Pagans tend to be very private, and do not advertise their faith at publicly as some others might. This is mainly because of past persecutions. However, for those who are sincerely interested, there always exist persons with whom to visit and explore that interest. Check the Directory* at the back of this booklet for names of others who are open to contacts.

If you are sincere and rally want to set out upon the Pagan path, the first step is to find a Grove to study with. After a Grove accepts you, eventually you will attend Circles.

Do I Have To Give Up My Other Spiritual Paths To Become A Wiccan?

That will depend on the tradition and the teacher. In general, Pagans are most tolerant of any philosophical structure, and ask only that the tolerance be returned. You will not be requested to do anything that differs with your beliefs and spiritual needs.

Does Being Pagan Make A Person Special Or Different?

Well yes, of course. But the special qualities are available to everybody. Everything that Pagans do with Magick is done in other religions by other names. It is only that we have found that these particular formulas, beliefs, and celebrations work best for us.

These are varying approaches to (and grasps of) personal Power. One way of recognizing someone who is truly Powerful is to note whether he or she seems to need control or influence over others. True personal power is content to control only the self, and personal reality.

Do You Cast Spells On Other People?

The major law in our religion is: "Do what you will, an it hurt no other." (The Golden Rule)

In other words, no one is prevented from exploration of God and GodSelf as long as others are not harmed.

We do believe in directing the energies of the universe toward accomplishment of certain ends, but magick is never effective on another person unless the person specifically requests it and takes responsibility for that request.

Attempts at so-called `black' magick, or use of the universal energies for negative or harmful purposes, only result in karmic backlash magnified at least threefold on the unfortunate would-be black magician.

Our tradition does not believe in the possibility of `psychic attack', and hence does not teach methods for combating it. Our philosophy tells us that to raise a force against `psychic attack' is only to create that which you fear.

Are Pagans Anti-Christian?

No. But many Christians are anti-Pagan. Historically there has existed an adversary relationship between Christianity and the Nature Religions (largely created by Christians.)

It takes much universal love not to strike back when attacked, and occasionally a Pagan might seem bitter or afraid as the result of anti-Pagan treatment. This is only a personal reaction, not a characteristic of the religion itself.

It is also true that Wiccans and Pagans have suffered dismissal from jobs and worse simply from their religious affiliation being revealed. Events like these lead to a certain caution and sometimes even an attitude approaching mild paranoia.

Who Is In Charge Of Paganism?

Each person is in charge of him or herself, responsible totally to Godd/ess. One might hear an individual called High Priestess, or Priest, but this title has more to do with the role played in ceremonies than with status in any formal hierarchy.

Groves and teaching groups sometimes have various levels of initiation, but again, these are individual to each tradition.

What Makes Wicca Different From Other Paths That Believe In The Psychic Powers?

We usually find that people most often comment on the robes and the tools. Traditionally we wear special garments while engaging in devotions, as a male Jew wears prayer shawl and skullcap. The garments have symbolism, and stand for beliefs of the person wearing them.

The tools are: a cup, knife, staff (or wand), and the pentacle, a 5-pointed star with 5th point upward, enclosed in a circle.

For those familiar with the tarot cards, this was the original source of the tarot suits as well as many meanings and symbolism in the tarot deck.

What Is Done With The Tools?

They are used, along with other objects, like candles, bells, and incense to focus energies and influence Universal forces with our prayers. If the format reminds you of Roman Catholic mass, that's because much of the indigenous Nature Religion's mysteries were `adopted' when Christianity moved into Northern Europe - into England, Scotland, Ireland and Scandinavia the lands of the Celts.

Also, if the tools and concepts seem to resemble elements in Rosicrucianism, the Caballa, and the Masonic Temple, it is because the latter paths drew and adopted Pagan rituals and forms for other uses. Since ours was an oral tradition we gratefully acknowledge the role these organizations played in bringing to modern times knowledge and insights which have otherwise been lost.

Here's a bit of trivia: Although the Founding Fathers of the U.S.A. generally held indifferent attitudes about Christianity they were all thirty-third degree Masons. Obviously they sought to incorporate their high ideals into writing our first constitution. This odd fact explains to some people why fundamentalist Christians and the

constitution occasionally seem to be at cross-purposes.

How Large Is The Religion?

Since Wicca, or Paganism, is an alternative religion uninterested in power or clout, we measure our `size' usually only by spiritual growth. There is a national newspaper published quarterly by which many Pagans keep in touch.

What About Science And Technology?

That's magick, too! Craft practitioners of old WERE the scientists there was need for healers and herbalists, agriculture and astronomy experts. The scientific method has now made teaching these subjects respectable in universities. But in the process we have lost the lore's former integration of the spiritual relationship between God Expressed As Nature and ourselves.

Many of us are scientifically trained and hold technological jobs and interests. This does not interfere with but only adds to a desire for ritual celebration and union with Godd/ess. Also many of us are ourselves practicing psychics, or are interested in extrasensory perception (ESP) and its uses. Paganism makes available a philosophical structure for all of these ends utilized effectively for millennia. It urges individuals to develop their personal powers within that structure and to use them thereafter in a responsible way.

That's Something Else: Why Don't I Ever Hear Or Read About Pagan Charities Or Good Works?

Good news makes terrible press. News media and supermarket tabloids would much rather print scandal and controversy. How many times have you seen a headline that attributed a person's conduct to his/her belief in Witchcraft? Do you ever see the same types of stories about Moslems, Jews or Christians?

In addition, organized charity can only be accomplished under certain forms of organized religious structures. That takes leadership, delegation of powers, community resources and accumulation of money and collective wealth.

We focus instead on personal responsibility and the necessity of reflecting Godd/ess in our characters and lives. Occasionally persons in the Craft will join together to change a situation or to help someone, but this is always done quietly and with the full knowledge and permission of those for whom the help of change in requested. It is always done without taking public credit. We feel that Godd/ess knows, and that is all we need.

How Can We Sum This Up In A Few Words?

Wicca, a branch of the spiritual movement called Neopaganism (or Paganism) is primarily a religion of personal, mystical relationship between the Universal Mind as expressed in Nature and the individual. It believes in Magick, or positive change wrought by prayer and ceremonial ritual. It brings its practitioners the joy of union and harmony with Godd/ess as expressed in Nature as well as fellowship with other persons who are on similar paths. Personal responsibility and growth are stressed, dogma and rigid beliefs are discouraged.

May godd/ess speak to you
in the voice you hear best.
Blessed be!

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